

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

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FM AMEMBASSY MANILA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6997

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TAGS: SHUM, SOPN, RP, US

SUBJECT: RESURGENCE OF MEDIA ATTENTION TO HUMAN RIGHTS

1. SUMMARY: AMBASSADOR'S ARRIVAL JUNE 5 HAS SERVED AS A CATALYST FOR A RESURGENCE OF MEDIA ATTENTION TO THE HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES. NEWS COVERAGE AND COMMENT WERE AGGRESSIVE AND ECHOED NOW FAMILIAR THEMES THAT US DOES NOT CORRECTLY PERCEIVE SITUATION IN PHILIPPINES AND THAT PRIORITIES OF DEVELOPING NATIONS MUST DIFFER FROM THOSE OF US. "TIMES JOURNAL" DEVOTED GREATEST AMOUNT OF SPACE TO HUMAN RIGHTS, REPORTING STATEMENTS OF THREE AMERICANS CRITICAL OF ADMINISTRATION'S HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY IN GENERAL AND US TREATMENT OF THE PHILIPPINES IN PARTICULAR. FOREIGN SECRETARY ROMULO'S ARRIVAL STATEMENT, UNDERLINING MANY OF THESE HUMAN RIGHTS THEMES, WAS ALSO FEATURED. THOUGH US AND PHILIPPINES DIFFER ON HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES, THERE APPEARS TO BE IMPLICIT AGREEMENT THAT HUMAN RIGHTS IS NOW PERMANENT PART OF US-PHILIPPINE DIALOGUE. END SUMMARY.

2. ARRIVAL OF AMBASSADOR MURPHY PROVIDED CATALYST FOR RESURGENCE OF MEDIA ATTENTION TO HUMAN RIGHTS, ESPECIALLY AS IT AFFECTS US-PHILIPPINE BILATERAL RELATIONS. NEWS-PAPER NEWS COVERAGE AND EDITORIAL COMMENT WERE COMPOSBD OF

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NOW TRADITIONAL THEMES,(A) ATTRIBUTING US DISSATISFACTION WITH THE PHILIPPINE HUMAN RIGHTS RECORD TO THE MACHINATIONS OF THE "WESTERN PRESS" AND EMBASSY "DIPLOMATIC CAREERISTS" LEFT OVER FROM THE SULLIVAN AND NEWSOM PERIODS, (B) CHARGING THE US WITH SELECTIVE CONCERN FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AMONG VARIOUS COUNTRIES, (C) NOTING THAT THE PHILIPPINES FAVORS THE PROTECTION AND EXTENSION OF HUMAN

RIGHTS BUT THAT DIFFERENT CONDITIONS HERE NECESSITATE DIFFERENT PRIORITIES, AND (D) ACCUSING THE US OF ARROGANCE.

3. AS IN THE PAST, MANILA PRESS HAS NOT TREATED HUMAN RIGHTS AS A DISCRETE ISSUE, BUT LINKED IT TO ANCILLARY ISSUES OF PRESS COVERAGE OF PHILIPPINES BY US MEDIA, AMERICAN ARROGANCE AND "MEDDLING IN PHILIPPINE DOMESTIC AFFAIRS. "TIMES JOURNAL," FOR EXAMPLE, EDITORIALIZED JUNE 8 THAT PRESIDENT CARTER HAS "DOGGEDLY ATTEMPTED TO IMPOSE ON OTHER NATIONS HIS DOCTRINE OF HUMAN RIGHTS AS IF HE WERE ISSUING COMMANDS TO PEANUT FARMERS IN GEORGIA. AND THE AMERICAN PRESS, SUBSERVIENT...TO ANYTHING THAT WILL PERPETUATE AMERICAN SUPREMACY OVER OTHER NATIONS, HAS BEEN SELLING THIS LINE GLEEFULLY."

4. OF THE THREE MAJOR MANILA DAILIES, "TIMES JOURNAL" (OWNED BY MRS. MARCOS' BROTHER BENJAMIN "KOKOY" ROMUALDEZ) DEVOTED GREATEST SPACE TO CRITICAL COVERAGE OF US HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY. THE "JOURNAL" GAVE FRONT-PAGE COVERAGE TO CRITICAL VIEWS OF THREE AMERICANS REGARDING HUMAN RIGHTS IN GENERAL AND US POLICY TOWARDS THE PHILIPPINES IN PARTICULAR. "JOURNAL" PUBLISHED FRONT-PAGE ARTICLE JUNE 6 IMMEDIATELY BELOW PICTURE OF AMBASSADOR AT AIRPORT, REPORTING VIEWS OF EDITOR OF "ARIZONA REPUBLIC NEWSPAPER" AN FORMER (1938-1941) EDITOR OF "PHILIPPINES FREE PRESS," LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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FREDERIC S. MARQUARDT. MARQUARDT'S VIEWS WERE REPORTEDLY CONTAINED IN A LETTER TO REPRESENTATIVE BERKLEY BEDELL, A FREQUENT CONGRESSIONAL CRITIC OF THE PHILIPPINE GOVERNMENT ACCORDING TO THE "JOURNAL," MARQUARDT TOLD BEDELL THE US MUST STOP ALIENATING OUR FRIENDS BY "TELLING THEM HOW TO MANAGE THEIR DOMESTIC AFFAIRS." JUNE 8 THE "TIMES JOURNAL" CONTINUED THE SAME LINE, CITING A LETTER TO THE "CHICAGO TRIBUNE" BY FORMER AMBASSADOR TO THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC PHELPS DENOUNCING THE APPLICATION OF DOUBLE STANDARDS IN US CRITICISM OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATORS. THE SAME DAY THE "JOURNAL" ALSO PUBLISHED THE REMARKS OF JOE MURPHY, EDITOR OF THE GUAM'S "PACIFIC DAILY NEWS," WHO BLAMED THE ARROGANCE OF US MILITARY AND CIVILIAN LEADERS TOWARDS FILIPINOS FOR PLACING THE CONTINUED EXISTENCE OF US-PHILIPPINE MILITARY BASES IN JEOPARDY.

5. IN ADDITION TO "TIMES JOURNAL" EDITORIAL, THE "DAILY EXPRESS" JUNE 9 CHALLENGED THE US TO "SUBSTANTIATE THE DENIAL" OF AMBASSADOR MURPHY THAT US IS NOT TRYING TO DESTABILIZE THE PHILIPPINES. WITH OBVIOUS SARCASM, IT AGREED THAT "WESTERN PRESS ATTACKS," CONGRESSIONAL CUTS IN MILITARY AID AND INVESTIGATIONS OF ALLEGED ABUSES AND US

ECONOMIC PRESSURES CAN BE EXPLAINED IN OTHER WAYS, BUT NOTED THAT "THINLY VEILED REASONING" LIKE THIS IS NOT CREDIBLE TO THE "INCREASINGLY POLITICALLY CONSCIOUS FILIPINOS." THE "EXPRESS" ASKED FOR DEEDS -- THE EARLY CONCLUSION OF RP-US BASE AND ECONOMIC TREATY TALKS -- TO PROVE THE US DOES NOT "MEDDLE IN" PHILIPPINE AFFAIRS. THE "BULLETIN TODAY" CONTRIBUTED A SMALL POSITIVE COMMENT. IN AN EDITORIAL JUNE 4, THE "BULLETIN" TOOK NOTE OF AMBASSADOR MURPHY'S STATEMENT IN WASHINGTON THAT MEETING BASIC HUMAN NEEDS IS PART OF THE US' INTEREST IN ADVANCING HUMAN RIGHTS AND COMMENTED THAT THIS WAS ALSO THE POLICY OF THE

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PHILIPPINE GOVERNMENT. "HEALTHY COOPERATION IN THIS REGARD WILL STRENGTHEN THE TIES BETWEEN THE TWO NATIONS," THE "BULLETIN" SUGGESTED.

6. WITH THE EXCEPTION OF THE "DAILY EXPRESS" IRREPRES-
SIBLE TEODORO VALENCIA, MANILA'S COLUMNISTS WERE QUIET.
VALENCIA CONTINUED HIS ACERBIC COMMENTS ON THE DISTOR-
TIONS OF THE "WESTERN PRESS" AND QUOTED EXTENSIVELY FROM
THE PHELPS, MURPHY AND MARQUARDT STATEMENTS.

7. ALL THREE DAILY PAPERS PUBLISHED REPORTS OF FOREIGN
MINISTER ROMULO'S STATEMENT ON HIS RETURN FROM NEW YORK
WHERE HE MET WITH SECRETARY VANCE WHILE ATTENDING THE
SPECIAL SESSION ON DISARMAMENT (TEXT SENT SEPTTEL).
ROMULO REPORTED VANCE WAS "ASTONISHED BY THE GAP BETWEEN
MY EXPLANATION OF CONDITIONS IN THE PHILIPPINES AND THE
REPORTS APPEARING IN THE AMERICAN PRESS." ROMULO FURTHER
CLAIMED HE "IMPRESSED ON HIM THE FACT THAT WHILE WE
UNDERSTAND THE US POSITION ON HUMAN RIGHTS, DEVELOPING

COUNTRIES NECESSARILY HAD A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE.
FREEDOM FROM WANT TOOK (SIC) PRECEDENCE OVER FREEDOM OF
EXPRESSION AND INDEED THE LATTER IS NOT POSSIBLE EXCEPT
IN CONTEXT OF THE FORMER."

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8. COMMENT: THE ARRIVAL OF AMBASSADOR MURPHY IS THE
LATEST IN A SERIES OF EVENTS, INCLUDING THE DERIAN AND
MONDALE VISITS, WHICH HAVE PROVOKED MEDIA ATTENTION TO THE
US' HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY AND ITS APPLICATION TO THE
PHILIPPINES. AS THEY HAVE IN THE PAST, THE MEDIA HAS
TAKEN AN AGGRESSIVE POSTURE, CHALLENGING US ASSESSMENT
OF THE FACTUAL SITUATION IN THE PHILIPPINES AS WELL AS
WHAT THEY PERCEIVE AS AN ETHNOCENTRIC DECISION TO
EMPHASIZE POLITICAL RIGHTS ABOVE ECONOMIC WELFARE. THE
STRENGTH OF THE REACTION TO HUMAN RIGHTS BY MANILA'S
"GUIDED PRESS " APPEARS TO INDICATE THAT HUMAN RIGHTS HAVE
NOW BECOME A PERMANENT PART OF THE CONTINUING US-PHILIP-
PINE DIALOGUE. MURPHY

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